

## ON CRUCIFIXION

### A STUDY IN THE LESSER MYSTERIES

In the preceding paper it was asserted that the New Testament narrative of the Crucifixion, besides enshrouding truths of a profounder order, symbolically forthshadows a supreme and crucial event to the conscious experience of which the individual soul is predestined, at some period of its upward career, as the condition of its further advancement. It was indicated that that experience must needs be universal and common to all men, since all men's origin and destiny are alike; and, further, that it is necessarily inevitable since, in the evolutionary, or redemptive, process by means of which man is gradually being restored out of the chaos of the Fall and refashioned into the image of his Maker, the microcosmic creature must assimilate himself to the macrocosmic Creator by deliberately appropriating to himself the enduring cross and passion that Creator has voluntarily assumed by the mere fact of His self-manifesting and causing man to be. "Whoso is crucified with Me shall reign with Me." Not alone of our Lord is the great Nicene dogma true that for us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven and was made man, suffered and was buried. What is true of our Lord is true also, and in a still more tremendous way, of that transcendent Power whom our Lord called "Father." For, by the very process of His primal and continuous self-manifesting, the "Father" also came, and still is coming, down from heaven; is voluntarily incarnating and being made, man. His name too is Immanuel, the Immanent One, the "God with(in) us" and within all things. The visible world is the Calvary of His perpetual crucifixion;

the limitations of time and space are, to-day, His own self-made and self-borne, circumscribing cross; *our* bodies of mortality are the sepulchre wherein *His* body of glory still lies swathed and buried; nor can His resurrection therefrom be accomplished save by the spiritual perfecting of humanity, and the conscious realisation by the human race in its entirety that "we and the Father are one"; that God and humanity are, as in the consummation they will prove to be, identical.

The Cosmos, then, is as a symphony wherein crucifixion is asserted and reasserted as a leading *motif*, the first strains of which were sounded in the primal silence when as yet there was none to hear. Our Lord uttered them for our example in the manifested world. Shall not humanity echo them from every unit of its vast orchestra? God crucified Himself when He willed to become a Creator, as every human father gives of his own life and substance to create and rear his children. Thereby He renounced a part of His own consciousness and submerged His own Spirit-Substance into phenomenal conditions, that thereout might emerge myriads of individuated consciousnesses, Himself the common multiple of all, and each destined to become a multiplier of His own being and His own joy. God—wrote the author of the *Timæus*, 400 years B.C., voicing the doctrine of the secret schools of the Mysteries—designed this world archetypally in heaven, and then *bent it crosswise*; whence it ensues that evolving nature, which is the phenomenal manifesting of the archetypal thought, strives everywhere to exhibit the symbol of the cross. The chemic crystal and the snowflake contain the cross as their structural principle; every leaf and flower is the modification of a cruciform idea; every sub-human vertebrate is an effort to produce a physical organism expressive of the primal thought, until at length man, standing erect with arms outstretched to his Maker (a posture Origen taught his pupils was the most fitting attitude for prayer), proclaims to heaven that the perfect symbol is accomplished in a self-conscious organism.

Who can deny me power and liberty  
 To stretch mine arms and mine own cross to be?  
 Swim, and at every stroke thou art thy cross;  
 The mast and yards are theirs whom seas do toss;  
 Look down, thou seest crosses in small things,  
 Look up, thou seest birds fly on crossed wings.  
 —Donne.

And in the course of the development of consciousness in the physical world, from the earliest manifesting of sentience to that supreme act of mystic union when, in Maeterlinck's great phrase, in "the polar regions of the mind the psychology of man mingles with the psychology of God," there comes a stage when the individuated unit of consciousness must, in his turn, voluntarily and deliberately crucify *himself* and so enter into harmony with his Maker. Upon no less terms than by willingly sharing, and consciously participating in, his Creator's own experience, can individual man hope to realise the fulness of his own nature; by no other means can he appreciate the stupendous sacrifice made for him from the beginning; and not otherwise can he participate in the eventual fruition of the divine scheme and purpose. The perfect adjustment and reconciliation of those temporarily antagonised opposites, God and man (the antagonism being an inevitable incident of the creative process, and apparent rather than real), is attainable only by "the King's Highway of the Holy Cross"; by the death in life of all that at first seems to make for life. The conscious merging of the human in the divine consciousness, as a preparative for which our "fall" into physical conditions was a necessity, and up to which all subsequent evolution and all history lead, finds its realisation, as it has found its highest symbol, in the cross. At the centre of this emblem of reconciled and balanced opposites—

My rendezvous is appointed; it is certain.  
 The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms;  
 The Great Camerado, the Lover true for whom I pine, will  
     be *there*.

The crucifixion-scene in the Gospels, based indubit-

ably upon an equivalent event in our Lord's earthly career, but one the precise nature of which we are assured by many early Christian authorities and by certain secret traditions has always been withheld from the multitude, was intended as an economy of profound verities which, even after nineteen centuries, the world at large can scarcely be said as yet to have appreciated. On the other hand, official doctrine has been more concerned in attaching to the recorded crucifixion of Jesus merely a certain soteriological value, acquiescence in which has been asserted here or there with less or greater insistence to be the condition of salvation and to constitute the hall-mark of a Christian. But the redemption of souls is attainable by nothing so meagre as mere intellectual assent to an event of but the temporal order, whatever its ulterior effects, and one of which, as just indicated, the world is but imperfectly cognisant. Spiritual verities essential to our welfare assuredly assume *some* form of outward and phenomenal expression, otherwise they would fail altogether to enter the province of human knowledge and could not achieve the purpose of being living examples for mankind; and that our Lord, over and above the lifelong immolation involved in His assumption of mortal conditions, underwent an experience vital to the welfare of us all, and one that is testified to under certain veils of allegory in the Gospels, is beyond question, although the exact nature of that experience has not yet passed into the knowledge of the market-place. The world has yet to crucify its own conception of the Crucifixion. To assert this is not to disparage, or impute invalidity to, the belief of millions of Christian souls who through the centuries have staked their salvation, and found ample and superabundant spiritual food in but a partial concept and a limited understanding (more than which no man in this world can possess) of the supreme event in human annals, but of which a deeper appreciation has, at the same time, been the privilege of a minority, as the records of various types of Christian mysticism amply testify. No; the profounder the truth, the slower and more laborious for the world at large is its

apprehension. By "here a little and there a little" are the Mysteries learned by humanity in the mass: first in the temple's outer courts, and by means of the letter, the symbolic *simulacrum*, and the official doctrine; afterwards in the *adyta*, by the spiritual sense and the inward vision. With the passing of cruder notions of the Crucifixion will vanish also the unripe and impotent concept (again the shadow and approximation of a profound and imperfectly appreciated truth) which regards the death of Jesus as a substitutional sacrifice for the misdeeds of mankind and one that exonerates man from divine ostracism. It is truly written that "a brother redeems not; no man may redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him nor the price of the redemption of his soul; but a man must himself labour for it continually."<sup>1</sup> Redemption, although a cosmic and inevitable process, is, notwithstanding many helps and graces vouchsafed from sources outside ourselves, in the last resort accomplishable only by the conscious effort and co-operation of the individual will with that of the eternal Creator-Saviour who was before Abraham and before Jesus of Nazareth; who has revealed Himself and "saved" in other forms than we now wot of: who has been known by other names than Christ, and who has hallowed the shrines of other faiths than that called Christian. Yet here again the tentative, initial efforts of the human mind to grasp a great mystery are not rudely or ungraciously to be dispraised. They betoken the sincere and arduous attempts of the evolving consciousness of the race to apprehend a truth before which angels veil their faces; they are an unconscious homage to the sublimity of a sacrifice upon which more worlds than this reverently ponder; they are an earnest of that deeper appreciation of the truth which shall come to pass when the time is ripe for that which is now hidden to be declared, and for that which is now but whispered in secret places to be proclaimed upon the housetops.

Let us pass now from the outward and general to the

<sup>1</sup> I translate from the Latin Psalter, which is often clearer than the English version.

inward and personal. Since, as we saw the various allegories of the Fall indicated, it was through instability of will in a pre-mundane state of existence, and through desire misdirected towards knowledge of things *external*, that the human soul uncentred itself and became delivered into the captivity of physical conditions, so its return thereout must be initiated by the corrected exercise of the same faculty, and by the desire for knowledge of things *internal*. The unbalanced, perverted faculty caused its descent; the rectified faculty ensures its ascent. The depth of our degradation is assuredly the measure of the height to which we may return, and for Pope Gregory's aphorism, *Corruptio optimi pessima*, we may learn the truth of the converse maxim, *Exaltatio pessimi optima*. "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the rivers in the South."—"Create within me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." The man animated by this desire begins to hasten and assist in his own development. He who hitherto has been but the unconscious subject of the mechanical forces and evolutionary energies of Nature becomes now a conscious co-operator with them; instead of being subjugated by them, he begins to lead captivity captive and make it subserve him. Now a well-defined feature of the evolutionary process in all the kingdoms of Nature is the self-abnegation, at a certain stage of growth, of organs, faculties, qualities or habits, which up to that period have been essential to existence. Primitive man, struggling against his environment for mere physical life and necessities, develops qualities of ruthless self-assertion entirely proper and essential *ad hoc*; nay, even divinely ordained to that end; but which at a later epoch of progress must be repressed in the larger interests of organised society. His successor, the *homme moyen sensuel* of modern life, admirable citizen though he be in his own order, is, in turn, called upon to surrender his complacency with the improved social and intellectual environment he or his forbears have succeeded in creating, before he can hope to attain citizenship in a kingdom which is indeed in, but which is not of, this world. The organism that, physically

and mentally, has been gradually nourished and adjusted by natural forces into a suitable vehicle or cradle in which the ever-present spiritual Ego may be brought to birth and nourished into self-consciousness, must be "denied," said "no" to; and the realisation of the fact that there is a lower self rigorously to be gainsaid, and a higher self sedulously to be cultivated, is the first symptom that a man is emerging from unconsciousness of the fact that he is carrying a cross, and that that cross consists of everything in and about himself by which he has previously set store, and which hitherto has seemed to constitute his life, his *raison d'être*. This first conscious, as distinct from notional, apprehension of the distinction between the illusory and the real, of the not-self and the true self, is wont to generate that impulse to retreat from the world and cultivate the spiritual nature in ascetic retirement, which has found its full expression in monasticism; an impulse, however, indicative of moral weakness. The heroic and more profitable course is to stand one's ground; to "take up your bow and fight" where you are, as that great Oriental guide-book to the inward way, the *Bhāgavad Gita*, teaches; to recognise that everyone's position in life is the product of cosmic energies so directed by the Eternal Wisdom as to determine his present environment, and to make it, and none other, precisely the situation most suited for his own development, and (since no man lives or dies to himself alone) for promoting, by reaction, the development of others. "I pray *not* that Thou would'st take them out of the world," said the great Instructor. The true asceticism consists not in evading obstacles to the spiritual life, but in their conquest and transvaluation; not in puritanically avoiding contact with the world's social life, but in an inward freedom from subjection to illusory ideals; and least of all in a temper of philosophic stoicism, but rather in a blithe detachment from external things, and in that serene and meek acquiescence in things as they eventuate which learns "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

The "Augean Stable," then, of personality (as the

truth is expressed in a familiar classic myth) must be cleansed, that therein, as in that other stable at Bethlehem, a certain "child" may be born, though it be but among those "beasts" which in our Scriptures always connote our animal nature. The perverse habits, fears, and prejudices of the rationalising intellect must be subdued; the *mala mentis gaudia* (the initiate Virgil knew the doctrine well!) must be extirpated; the lower chambers of the false self evacuated, and an "upper room" made ready "furnished"; preliminary exercises which the great mystic Louis de Saint-Martin speaks of as "the rarefying as far as possible the intervening media between oneself and the true sun, so that the opposition being practically none, there may be a free passage and the rays of light may reach us without refraction." Herewith, of course, is involved the persistent orientation to the desired end of that one faculty within us which scientific psychology has found itself powerless to explain, but which the illuminated writer last cited affirms is the sole faculty remaining to man of his primal Edenic state—the will. "This he enjoyed in his glory, and he enjoys it still in his fall. By it he went astray; by it alone he can hope to be re-established in his primeval rights. Nothing in time is more powerful than the will of man, which in its impure and criminal state still has capacities similar to that of the principle which originally became evil." "There is no soul," says our own Shakespeare, "more stronger to direct you than yourself." The will expressing itself in persistent aspiration and enlightened desire ("faith," or the intellectual assurance of the possibility of regeneration, being a necessary implicit of such willing) allies us forthwith to the Divine desire and will. "Draw nigh unto God, and God will draw nigh unto you"; the response is instantaneous, automatic, for, by the very act of sincere desire, the subconscious soul puts itself *en rapport* with an omnipresent Divine principle cognate to itself; a principle which instantly "comes forth to meet it while as yet it is a long way off," *i.e.* in the initial effort and before the more limited and torpid brain-



consciousness becomes aware of the fact. Filled, like the exiled Daniel, with a spiritual nostalgia, we must "open the windows of our chamber towards Jerusalem," and, like a greater than Daniel, "steadfastly set our face to go thither"; remembering always that that city is within, and not without, ourselves; and that as one of those two prototypes, before attaining his goal, was subjected to passing a night in solitude within a den of savage brutes (again the parable of an inward ordeal),<sup>1</sup> and the other to the silent anguish of Calvary, so in turn is the aspirant destined to undergo an analogous experience or "dark night of the soul" before his desiderated term is reached.

That the journey is laborious and painful every follower of the inward way knows profoundly. Assuredly the mind keyed up to the attitude just described will speedily experience the consequences of antagonising against "the prince of the power of the air," the magnetic *aura* generated by the old lower self and still ensphering it, exposed to which he will find himself standing naked and ashamed, and sensitive to every impact of its adverse current. Agonies of apprehension will seize him as former ideals crumble into futility, and trusted supports collapse in ruin. But equally assuredly will he discern these to be replaced by others for which the old have served as but temporary substitutes; that substance is being exchanged for shadows; that his seeming solitude is not unwatched; and that the shifting sands of his temporal circumstance are most subtly being redispersed to his true advantage as though by angels who have been given charge concerning him.

In its present place of removal at the Lateran at Rome one may see the *Scala Santa*; the sacred steps by which our Lord is said to have ascended to Pilate's judgment-hall, and up which Christian pilgrims, as an act of faith and emulation, and in a posture of humility and prayer, ascend the stairway toilsomely and upon their knees; whilst the "narrow way" itself is flanked by parallel

<sup>1</sup> So also the Psalmist's "My soul is among lions," and St Paul's fighting with "beasts" at Ephesus.

broader flights of steps from which casual wayfarers and sightseers watch the upward progress of the devotees. *Sic itur ad astra*; after this manner is the ascent of the soul to the heights; step by step upwards beneath the unsympathetic criticism and contradicting impulses of the lower nature, and amid appeals from without to take the broader, easier<sup>1</sup> path. But synchronously with the rectification of the will, with the repression of the contrary assertions and processes of the logical intellect (a faculty hitherto deemed paramount), and the suppression of inimical habits of desire and mind, "that no thought pass that helpeth not the soul," there will be found taking place a process of self-becoming; an increase of cognitional faculty; a coming to birth of new qualities and of an enhanced volume of consciousness hitherto undeveloped, which are their own self-sufficient testimony of progress and which are also an earnest of a development of consciousness that is illimitable. For now, in the terms of the profound spiritual science of the East, the limited personal self is drawing near in consciousness to the universal "Self," the Atman, the Christ. The centripetal action of the spiritual will is energising against, and subduing, those centrifugal tendencies of the old nature which hitherto have been prepotent; is drawing them into itself and transmuting them to spiritual power. Man is an image of the solar system with its array of sun-ejected planets; this in turn is sacramental of the self-extrusion and manifestation in nature of God. And as the planets are destined to reabsorption into their centre, their solar life-giver, in emulation of their Creator who, in the consummation, will indraw His entire universe into Himself, so, in like manner, man also is ordained to recall his peripheral nature into his own central spirit and to "take his manhood into God"; into the divine kingdom within himself. The contrary motions of inner and outer, of the indwelling spiritual and the outward and sensual, of the strong current of the

<sup>1</sup> The recently opened pilgrim's railway from Damascus to Mecca has been much decried by many Mahomedans as detracting from the symbolic toilsomeness of the journey on foot to their "Holy City."

mundane life and the opposing current of the soul's life, testify to a principle inherent in the Cosmos itself. St Paul spoke of it as "a law warring within his members"; the seer Ezekiel described it "as it were a wheel within a wheel," as Plato also has called it "a circle moving within a circle."

The fulfilment in oneself of this law involves labour and effort. It involves also pain; sensible and, in a sense, physical pain, induced by the introduction of "new wine" into renovated "bottles" and its fermentation therein; by the indrawing, that is to say, of a supersensual *plasm*, that gradually changes this vile body and fashions it into a Christ-vehicle, and which, as it transmutes and regenerates, *repolarises* the inner, finer, vehicles of consciousness, the neural system, and lastly the entire cell-structure of the body of flesh itself. It is the birthpangs felt by the old man as the Christ is "formed" in him; for "the first man is of the earth, earthy; the second is from heaven." "It is," to cite again the French mystic, "the peculiar pain that awaits every man who sets his hand to the Great Work. It is the participation of the human in the divine sorrow of the universal Charity, and the gates of this participation are the spiritual sufferings and oppositions we encounter daily on earth, whether from the chief enemy, our individual astral laws, or from the rest of mankind."

Three crosses stood upon Calvary, as, by a variation of metaphor, three men were cast into the furnace of the Babylonian king. Yet, for the purposes of our instruction, these three are but one. They allegorise individual man's prismatic triplicity of body, soul, and spirit, each of which must suffer crucifixion, or, alternatively, pass through the superheated alembic of inward fire, ere the resurrection of the new man takes place from the grave of the old, or "the form of the fourth" becomes apparent in a regenerated "son of God."

It is as needless to define what is implied by the crucifixion of the body as it is difficult to speak of what is involved in the crucifixion of the spirit. Of that last

supreme ordeal our Scriptures offer hints to the imagination rather than speak exactly, whilst the later literature of the inner life abounds in almost futile efforts to record experiences scarcely lending themselves to verbal relation. It is to the crucifixion of the soul, connoting by that word the logical reason and intellect, the psychical desire-nature and all that is meant by St Paul's term, the "carnal mind," that the Gospel narratives seem to point with detailed and more especial emphasis, as though proclaiming a message specially pertinent to humanity in its present stage of development. Obviously no one may assert what form crucifixion will assume for any given soul. *Tot homines, quot cruces.* Every man will bear his own peculiar burden as best and most efficaciously he can endure it; it may consist in an experience coinciding with a lifetime; it may be the swift, revealing anguish of a single hour. In a general sense terrestrial life is in itself a crucifixion, and the buffetings and tribulations inevitably incident to our imprisonment here are reminders and sacramental shadows premonishing our ignorance of the deeper mystery into which, later or sooner, we are all called upon to be initiated in full consciousness.

With stumbling feet and much apparently ineffectual effort, through alternating seasons of spiritual exaltation and inhibition, step by step the soul consciously advances along the *Via Dolorosa* to its hour of *crisis*, or crossing over from a lower state of development to a higher. Its raiment of old preconceptions is stripped from it. It is scourged by its own self-imposed discipline; the gall and vinegar of tribulation are, at its own request, given it to drink when it thirsts for liberation. It enters a judgment-hall which, whether called that of Pilate or that of the Osiris of the Egyptian Mysteries, is within itself; it sentences its own self to death; and thus it realises at length the inwardness of the great tragedy upon which, in its more outward aspect, the faith of Christendom is based, and the message of which is this:—

To the natural intellect and reason of man, a faculty supreme in its own, but secondary, order—a God-given

light to lighten Gentiles in the outer courts of the Eternal's temple, but ever, as moon to sun, a lesser and reflected light,—the word is spoken, **THY FIRE BE QUENCHED!** *Thy head, the seat and symbol of the intellect, must be crowned and crushed with thorns.*

To the physical energy and activities of man, by which he may perform all things of the earthly order, but which are ineffectual to accomplish the works of the spirit or to lift him above his own fallen level, the command is given, **THOU SHALT CEASE FROM DOING!** *Thy hands, the organs and symbols of action, shall be fast nailed.*

To the physical restlessness of man, ever going to and fro in quests that have no satisfying goal; to the roivings and challengings of his querulous mind that would probe the secrets of earth and analyse the mysteries of heaven, the bidding comes, **BE STILL, AND KNOW!** *Thy feet, the organs and symbols of motion, shall be fast nailed.*

One thing remains. To all longings of the heart that beats not yet in keeping with the Sacred Heart; to all natural clinging and desire that know not yet the depth and measure of Divine Desire; when the "soldiers," or militant forces of external circumstance, have broken the bones of the body and crippled the energies of the mind; when all capacity for action and motion has ceased, and only feeling lingers, the initiating Angel of the Shadow whispers the final secret, **THOU SHALT CEASE FROM ALL SELF-WILLING!** *Thy heart, the seat and symbol of the affections, shall be pierced as with a spear.*

Deep answers unto deep; there exist profound correspondences between God and man; between man the individual and man the race. The race in its corporateness, considered as the mystical humanity of God, is destined to endure its three hours' agony; to suffer the threefold crucifixion of body, soul, and spirit. Scarcely as yet can it be said to have lived through the first "hour"; the beast within us is not yet killed, although with the development of the ethical and social instincts he has been sore wounded. And as that first hour or cycle of time has been appropriated, first to the develop-

ment, and afterwards to the repression, of the physical nature and faculties of man, so will the second hour consist in a like process in respect of his psychological nature and faculties; whilst to the yet remote future of the race is relegated that third and supreme hour appointed for the crucifixion of the spirit; upon the accomplishment of which man's cup of destiny will have been drained, and there will be pronounced the great word of consummation of the Divine scheme, "It is finished."

Meanwhile for each individual who, in the vanguard of his fellows, bears the threefold cross, and by it is borne into the heights, there awaits the threefold crown. Such an one may still live yet a while upon the earth, but his conscious conversation is with heaven. In the terms of the Christian Scriptures he "knows the power of His resurrection by having been made conformable unto His death"; in those of the Buddhist (for all religions teach the same truth),

That which began in him when he began  
Is finished. He hath wrought the purpose through  
Of That which made him man. He goes  
Unto Nirvana; he is one with Life.

In the symbolic honours of the Latin Church, he who has endured the threefold crucifixion of body, soul, and spirit, is, in the Community of the Saints, as a Holy Father in Christ; and, in virtue of his experience of the heights and depths of his own being, to him have been committed the keys of heaven and hell; whilst in those of yet another, and an equivalent, school of the Mysteries, he has been "raised to the sublime degree of Master-Mason" in the House not made with hands. Upon his head he wears the mitre with the triple crown, and around his loins the apron with the triple *Tau*.